

Difficulty Level of Topics in Senior School Arabic Language Curriculum in Oke-Ogun, Oyo State, Nigeria

Tahap Kesukaran Tajuk dalam Kurikulum Bahasa Arab Sekolah Tinggi di Oke-Ogun,
Oyo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined teachers' perception of the difficulty levels of topics in senior school Arabic curriculum. A total of 30 Arabic Language teachers from 30 senior schools constituted the study sample. The variables considered were teacher's qualifications and years of teaching experience. A checklist containing all topics (82) of senior school Arabic Language curriculum was used for data collection. The study was anchored to four research questions. The content and face validity of the instrument were done by giving the checklist to two teachers of Arabic Language in senior secondary schools and specialists in Arabic education at the University of Ilorin. Test-retest was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages. The score of the first and the second times of administration of the checklist were correlated using Pearson r . The correlation coefficient value was 0.96. The findings revealed that seven topics were perceived to be very difficult; 18 topics were perceived to be difficult; while 57 topics were perceived to be not difficult by the respondent. Conclusion were drawn on the basis of these findings.

Keywords: Arabic language; senior school; education; difficulty level; language

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji persepsi guru terhadap tahap kesukaran topik kurikulum bahasa Arab di sebuah sekolah tinggi (senior). Seramai 30 guru bahasa Arab dari 30 buah sekolah tinggi dijadikan sampel kajian. Pemboleh ubah kajian ialah kelayakan dan tahun pengalaman mengajar guru. Senarai semak yang mengandungi semua topik (82) kurikulum Bahasa Arab sekolah tinggi telah digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Sebanyak empat soalan menjadi fokus kajian. Kesahan kandungan dan kesahan muka instrumen yang mengandungi senarai semak telah dibuat oleh dua orang guru Bahasa Arab di sekolah-sekolah menengah tinggi dan pakar dalam pendidikan Bahasa Arab di Universiti Ilorin. Ujian dan ujian semula telah digunakan untuk menentukan kebolehpercayaan instrumen. Data dianalisis menggunakan kekerapan dan peratusan. Senarai semak kali pertama dan kedua digunakan untuk mencari korelasi Pearson r . Nilai pekali korelasi adalah 0.96. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa tujuh tajuk telah dilihat sebagai sangat sukar, 18 tajuk telah dilihat sebagai sukar, manakala 57 tajuk telah dilihat sebagai tidak sukar. Kesimpulan, dapatan kajian adalah berdasarkan dapatan yang ditemui.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Arab; sekolah tinggi; pendidikan; tahap kesukaran; bahasa

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Arabic into the secondary school curriculum is justified by the historical, economic, cultural, diplomatic, political and international relevance of Arabic (Federal Ministry of Education 1985; 2007). Arabic Language is offered within the formal education system, at the primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions; and in private Arabic schools established by Muslim voluntary organizations and some well-to-do individuals. The curriculum must be subjected to periodic evaluation to know how to review and modify in order to bring positive changes.

Quite a number of studies have been conducted in the area of topics or concepts which students and teachers find difficult in some school subjects. The related empirical studies reviewed below are on subjects other than Arabic Language, like Biology, Chemistry, English Language, Mathematics and Physics. The studies were conducted abroad and in Nigeria. For example, Johnstone and Mahmoud (1980) examined isolated topics highly perceived as difficult in Biology. They used the Biology syllabus of the Scottish Certificate of Education Examination Board (SCEEB). One hundred and sixty-seven (167) participants responded to an index of difficulty. They sampled final year high school students, comparing

the responses of two groups with those of the examiners, teachers, lecturers and inspectors' report. They found that topics related to cell structure, body system, genetics and evolution were classified difficult.

Finlay et al. (1987) studied both content difficulty and importance as perceived by Earth Science, Physics, Chemistry and Biology teachers. They used 100 Wisconsin High School teachers to rate the importance and difficulty level of selected content areas. They used the mean rating and standard deviation of the responses to rank the first 15 most important and difficult content areas in each of the four science subjects. They found out that most of the important but difficult topics were in the area of photosynthesis, cellular respiration, Mendelian genetics and chromosomes theory of hereditary and hormonal control of human production.

Similarly, Longden (1982) investigated students' learning difficulties of genetics. He sampled 114 A' level Biology teachers. He interviewed 10 good students who had difficulty with genetics. A 50-item questionnaire was administered to respondents to identify aspects in genetics that were difficult to learn. Standard deviation, variance, t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data collected. He found that there was a break between the teaching of meiosis and the introduction of genetics. The students also had difficulty with representation of meiosis fixed in animate diagrams.

The focus of Balogun (1999) is on difficult concepts in Physics as perceived by senior secondary students in Kwara State, Nigeria. A total of 226 students (122 males and 104 females) randomly selected from four local government areas of the state constituted the study sample. A 29-item questionnaire was used to collect data. Simple percentages and chi-square were used for data analysis. The result revealed that six major concepts were considered difficult. These were equilibrium of forces, simple harmonic motion, simple alternating current circuits, fluid at rest and in motion, energy quantization, and wave particle paradox.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is a descriptive research using survey method. It describes topics in the senior secondary school Arabic Language curriculum perceived by teachers to be difficult.

According to Gay (1976), a descriptive study reports on an educational phenomenon the way it is. This study describes the phenomenon of Arabic Language teachers' perception of the difficulty levels of topics contained in the senior school Arabic Language curriculum. Thirty teachers of Arabic Language at secondary school level were purposely selected as respondents for the questionnaire because of their scarcity.

INSTRUMENTATION

The instrument used for data collection was a checklist made up of all the topics from the senior school Arabic Language curriculum. The topics reflected different classes of senior school. Section A of the instrument requested information about qualification and years of teaching experience. Section B contained all the topics of the senior school Arabic Language curriculum. The respondents were given three options against each difficult topic. These were "Very Difficult", "Difficult" and "Not Difficult". They were asked to tick any of the options which best represented their perceptions of the difficulty level on each topic. "Very Difficult" topics attracted 2 points, "Difficult" topics attracted 1 point, while "Not Difficult" topics attracted zero. The face and content validity of the instrument was done by giving the checklist to two teachers of Arabic Language in senior secondary schools and specialists in Arabic education at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. To establish its reliability, the checklist was administered to 30 teachers of Arabic twice with 2 weeks' interval. Scores of the first and second periods of administration were correlated using the Pearson *r*. The correlation co-efficient value was 0.96.

FINDINGS

The following research questions were answered by the study:

1. What is the perception of Arabic Language teachers as regards the difficulty levels of topics contained in the senior school Arabic Language curriculum?
2. Which of the topics are perceived to be very difficult?
3. Which of the topics are perceived to be difficult?
4. Which of the topics are perceived to be not difficult?

TABLE 1. Summary of levels of difficulty of topics as perceived by the respondents

موضوعات منهج اللغة العربية الثانوية	Topics of senior school Arabic Language curriculum	VD		D		ND		
		صعب جدا		صعب		غير صعب		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	الكلام و انواعه	Parts of speech	-	-	3	10%	27	90%
2	الاسماء	Nouns	-	-	1	3.3%	29	96.7%
3	المفرد	Singular	-	-	1	3.3%	29	96.7%
4	الجمع بانواعه	Plurals	2	6.7%	7	23.3%	21	70%
5	المدكر	Masculine	1	2.3%	4	13.3%	26	87.7%
6	المؤنث	Feminine	1	3.3%	6	20%	23	76.7%
7	حروف الجر	Prepositions	-	-	4	13.3%	26	86.7%
8	الجر بالاضافة	Noun construct	1	3.3%	14	46.7%	15	50%
9	الصفة الموصوف	Adjective and the nouns qualified	4	13.3%	11	36.7%	15	50%
10	العطف	Conjunction	2	6.7%	5	16.7%	23	76.6%
11	البدل	The permutative	5	16.7%	13	43.3%	12	40%
12	التوكيد	The emphatic	7	23.3%	7	23.3%	16	53.4%
13	فعل الماضي	Perfect verbs	-	-	3	10%	27	90%
14	فعل المضارع	Imperfect verbs	-	-	3	10%	27	90%
15	الفعل الامر	Imperative verbs	2	6.7%	2	6.7%	26	86.7%
16	الجوازم و النواصب	Particles governing imperfect verbs	4	13.3%	10	33.3%	16	53.4%
17	الجملة الفعلية	Nominal sentences	3	10%	9	30%	18	60%
18	الجملة الاسمية	Verbal sentences	4	13.3%	7	23.3%	19	63.4%
19	كان واحواتها	Kana and her associates	3	10%	8	26.6%	19	63.4%
20	ان واحواتها	Ina and her associates	5	16.7%	7	23.3%	18	60%
21	ظن واحواها	Zana and her associates	5	16.7%	13	43.3%	12	40%
22	المعرب	Declension of verbs	8	26.7%	12	40%	10	33.3%
23	المبني	Declension of nouns	8	26.7%	14	46.7%	8	26.6%
24	الازم	Transitive verbs	5	16.7%	10	33.3%	15	50%
25	المتعدي	Intransitive verbs	3	10%	9	30%	18	60%
26	الافعال الخمس	The five verbs	3	-	3	30	18	10%
27	تصريف الفعل	Conjunction of verbs	8	-	1	26.7%	14	46.6%
28	العدد من واحد الى ثلاثة الاف	Number from one to one thousand	7	-	1	26.9%	15	50%
29	الفعل	Active voice	1	6.7	7	13.3%	25	83.4%
30	نانبالفعل	Passive voices	2	2.3%	4	40%	16	53.3%
31	المصدر	Verbal noun	5	3.3%	6	33.3%	15	50%
32	اسم الفاعل	Active participle	2	-	4	26.7%	20	66.6%
33	اسم المفعول	Passive participle	2	3.3%	14	30%	19	63.3%
34	اسم التفضيل	The elative	6	13.3%	11	26.7%	16	53.3%
35	الصفة المشبهة	Derived adjective	8	6.7%	5	50%	7	23.3%
36	الفعل الجامد	Inflexible verbs	6	16.7%	13	36.7%	13	43.3%
37	الفعل المشتق	Derived verbs	5	23.3%	7	40%	13	43.3%
38	المنصوبات	The accusative	2	-	3	53.3%	12	40%
39	الحال	Adverbs of manner	2	-	3	50%	13	43.3%
40	التمييز	Specification	8	6.7%	2	23.3%	15	50%
41	المستثنى	The exempted	8	13.3%	10	30%	13	43.3%
42	المنادى	The vocative	4	10%	9	40%	14	46.7%
43	اسم التصغير	The diminutives	7	13.3%	10	30%	13	43.3%
44	اسم الالة	Nouns of instrument	5	10%	8	36.7%	14	46.6%
45	اسم الزمان	Noun of time	3	16.7%	7	23.3%	20	66.6%

Continued

Table 1 (Continue)

46	اسم المكان	Nouns of place	4	16.7%	13	26.7%	18	6
47	النسب	Relative adjective	6	26.7%	12	30%	15	50%
48	الاعیاد	Festivals	1	26.7%	14	43.4%	16	53.3%
49	اسرة حميدة	A commendable family	1	16.7%	10	50%	14	46.7%
50	السوق	Market	1	10%	9	30%	20	66.6%
51	زمان العطلة	Holiday period	1	10%	9	16.7%	24	80%
52	الحياة المدرسية	School life	4	26.7%	8	16.7%	21	70%
53	التعريف بالاد العرب	Introduction to Arab literature	9	23.3%	8	46.7%	7	23.3%
54	رحلة الى مصنع	Excursion to industry	4	3.3%	4	46.7%	12	40%
55	المستشفى	Hospitals	2	6.7%	12	33.3%	18	60%
56	المكتب المدرسة	School library	2	6.7%	10	33.3%	18	60%
57	فضائل الصدق	Prides of truth	4	13.3%	9	30%	17	56.7%
58	الاخلاص في العمل	Sincerity in deeds	2	6.7%	5	16.7%	23	76.6%
59	من اخلاص الرسول (ص)	Parts of the prophet's character	2	6.7%	4	13.3%	24	80%
60	الصدق الوفي	Trustworthy and honest friend	2	6.7%	9	30%	19	63.3%
61	الادب العربي الحديث	Modern Arab literature	12	40%	12	40%	6	20%
62	رعاية صحة البدن	Health observation of the body	4	13.3%	13	43.3%	13	43.4%
63	القرية	Village	2	6.7%	7	23.3%	21	70%
64	الزراعة	Farming	4	13.3%	8	26.7%	18	60%
65	دراسة بعض الادياء من العهد القديم الجاهلي	Poets in the age of ignorance	14	46.7%	8	26.7%	8	26.7%
66	ايات مجتارة في مكارم الاخلاق	Selected verses on excellent behaviours	4	13.3%	11	36.7%	15	50%
67	اثر الحضارة على المجتمع	Effects of cities on the society	11	36.7%	9	30%	10	33.3%
68	دول غرب افريقيا	West African nations	9	30%	15	50%	6	20%
69	دراسة بعض الادياء	A study of some literary men	7	23.3%	16	53.3%	7	23.4%
70	الادب العرب في نيجريا	Arab literature in Nigeria	12	40%	12	40%	6	20%
71	انشودة	A song	6	20%	10	33.3%	14	46.7%
72	العلم و التكنولوجيا	Knowledge and technology	11	36.7%	13	43.3%	6	20%
73	عثمان بن فودي	Uthman dan Fodio	4	13.3%	11	36.7%	15	50%
74	الدول الافريقية الناطقة بالانجليزية	English-speaking Africa countries	9	30%	8	26.7%	13	43.3%
75	الحكومة و واجب الفرد نحوها	Government and individual's toward her duties	8	26.6%	14	46.7%	8	26.7%
76	نماذج من الشعر و النشر العربي في نيجريا	Examples of Arabic prose and poem in Nigeria	11	36.7%	11	36.7%	8	26.6%
77	الاملاء	Dictation	1	3.3%	14	46.7%	15	50%
78	مختارات من الادب العربي في افريقيا عامة	Selected Arabic literary texts in African as a whole	13	43.3%	14	46.7%	3	10%
79	دراسة نصوص ادبية افريقية	A study of Africa literary texts	14	46.7%	14	46.7%	2	67%
80	الكتابة (الانشاء)	Essay writing	9	30%	14	46.7%	7	23.3%
81	الترجمة من الانجليزية الى العربية	Translation from English to Arabic	12	40%		30%	9	30%
82	الترجمة من العربية الى الانجليزية	Translation from Arabic to English	10	33.3%	11	36.7%	9	30%

TABLE 2. Classification of the difficult topics

Very difficult topics	Difficult topics	Not difficult topics
صعب جدا	صعب	غير صعب
الادب العربي الحديث	البذل	الكلام و أنواعه 1
دراسة بعض الادباء من العهد القديم الجاهلي	ظن واحواها	الاسماء 2
اثر الحضارة على المجتمع	المعرب	المفرد 3
الادب العربي في نيجيريا	المبني	الجمع بأنواعه 4
نماذج من الشعر و النشر العربي في نيجيريا	الصفة المشبهة	المدكر 5
دراسة نصوص ادبية افريقية	المنصوبات	المؤنث 6
الترجمة من الانجليزية الى العربية	الحال	حروف الجر 7
	اسرة حميدة	الجر بالاضافة 8
	التعريف بالاد العرب	الصفة الموصوف 9
	رخلة الى مصنع	العطف 10
	رعاية صحة البدن	التوكيد 11
	دول غرب افريقيا	فعل الماضي 12
	دراسة بعض الادباء	فعل المضارع 13
	العلم و التكنولوجيا	الفعل الامر 14
	الحكومة و واجب الفرد نحوها	الجوازم و النواصب 15
	محتارات من الادب العربي في افريقيا عامة	الجملة الفعلية 16
	الكتابة (الانشاء)	الجملة الاسمية 17
	الترجمة من العربية الى الانجليزية	كان واحواتها 18
		ان واحواتها 19
		اللازم 20
		المتعدي 21
		الافعال الخمس 22
		التصريف الفعل 23
		العدد من واحد الى ثلاثة الاف 24
		الفعل 25
		نائبالفعل 26
		المصدر 27
		اسم الفاعل 28
		اسم المفعول 29
		اسم التفضيل 30
		الفعل الجامد 31
		الفعل المشتق 32
		التمييز 33
		المستثنى 34
		المنادى 35
		اسم التصغير 36
		اسم الالة 37
		اسم الزمان 38
		اسم المكان 39
		النسب 40
		الاعياد 41
		السوق 42
		زمان العطلة 43
		الحياة المدرسية 44
		المستشفى 45
		المكتب المدرسة 46
		فضائل الصدق 47
		الاخلاص في العمل 48
		من اخلاص الرسول (ص) 49
		الصديق الوفي 50
		القرية 51
		الزراعة 52
		ايات مجتارة في مكارم الاخلاق 53
		انشودة 54
		عثمان بن فودي 55
		الدول الافريقية الناطقة بالانجليزية 56
		الاملاء 57

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings of this study are summarized as follows:

1. Seven of the topics in the curriculum of senior Arabic Language were perceived to be “very difficult”, eighteen were perceived to be “difficult”, while 57 were perceived to be “not difficult”.
2. Topics perceived to be very difficult were generally in the areas of comprehension, literature and translation.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to generally examine the perception of Arabic Language teachers in respect of the difficulty levels of topics contained in the senior school Arabic Language curriculum. Specifically, the study tried to find out: The perception of teachers in respect of very difficult, difficult, and not difficult topics in the senior school Arabic Language curriculum.

Tables one and two revealed that, out of the 82 topics of the Arabic Language curriculum, 57 were generally perceived as not difficult, 18 were perceived as difficult, while the remaining 7 were perceived as very difficult by the respondents. The topics that were perceived to be difficult were generally in the area of comprehension, Arabic literature and translation.

Specifically, the areas included the effect of cities on society in reading comprehension, modern Arab literature, poets in the age of ignorance, Arabic literature in Nigeria, examples of Arabic prose and modern poems in Nigeria and a study of African literary texts in Arabic literature. Translation from English into Arabic was also identified to be very difficult.

Teachers’ perception of effect of cities on society in the reading passage as being very difficult could be due to the contents of the topics. It involves one’s ability to identify or recognize new words or vocabulary development in the process of reading. Lack of relevant textbooks could also be a factor. Teachers’ perception of this topic as being difficult is catered for by El Araby (1974), who suggests meaningful teaching aids, such as reading cards, reading laboratories, cosmic magazines, posters and improvised materials for reading comprehension.

Literature is another topic perceived to be very difficult by the respondents. This is not a strange finding, because literature requires Arabic teachers to be well proficient in the language and requires years of study to master. Darkin (1973) suggests possible ways of getting the difficulty solved. These are behaviourist’s condition, condition for language learning and cognitive condition.

Translation from English into Arabic was also perceived to be difficult by the respondents. This is also an important aspect of language which requires the instructor

to be conversant with, and competent in both languages (English and Arabic). Umar (1975) argues that teachers should take into consideration the levels of awareness and social backgrounds of the speakers of the target language. He suggests that the passage to be translated be read twice for proper understanding; and that there should be a total translation in which no original word of the source is retained in the translation.

Tables 1 and 2 show topics that teachers perceived as difficult, in respect of research question 2 “which of the topics are perceived to be very difficult?” These included: the permutative, Zana and her associates, declension of verbs, derived adjective, declension of verbs, derived adjectives, declension of nouns, the accusative, adverbs of manner, a commendable family, introduction to Arab literature, excursion to industry and others as contained in table 2.

A critical examination of the topics perceived as difficult shows that most of them are grammatical topics, while other shares vocabulary development, reading comprehension and translation. The perception of the above as being very difficult and difficult could be attributed to lack of enough textbooks in the area, as rightly observed by Ibrahim (1999), that most of the recommended Arabic language textbooks are scarce and publishers did not reproduce them or the school authority and students cannot afford to buy them owing to the high prices of the books.

Further examination of Table 1 and 2 in respect of research question 4: “which of the topics are perceived to be not difficult?” revealed some topics perceived by the respondents to be not difficult. These included : nouns, part of speech, singular, plural, masculine, feminine, and preposition.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that: The curriculum of Arabic Language at the senior secondary level should be subjected to periodic review to prevent the teaching and learning of it from decay. This study will be relevant to organs of government that are responsible for curriculum design (NADERC). Lastly, this study was limited to only Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State because of financial constraints. A study that covers other states of the federation will surely yield more interesting findings.

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